



Connecticut AIDS Resource Coalition

**Testimony
Appropriations Committee
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Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, members of the committee. I'm Shawn Lang the Director of Public Policy with the CT AIDS Resource Coalition, the only statewide organization in Connecticut whose sole focus is the needs of people with HIV/AIDS.

I'm am here to talk about the untold harm that the Governor's proposed budget will have on the health of the nearly 11,000 people living with HIV/AIDS across this state; who are among the most medically and socially fragile and vulnerable people in this state.

We work to ensure that people living with HIV/AIDS in our state have the housing, health care, supportive services and HIV prevention education that they need in order to live their lives in dignity. I'm here to testify against the draconian cuts to health care and housing that the Governor is proposing.

All of the proposed cuts –instituting co-pays, removing vision services and non-emergency medical transportation, eliminating funding for non-formulary drugs under Part D, eliminating over-the-counter drugs, requiring PA for high cost drugs, etc., will do more to unnecessarily create additional barriers for people living with HIV/AIDS. And when people face these types of barriers, they get sicker and end up with much higher cost illnesses, unnecessary use of emergency rooms, and longer hospitalizations. This population is already extremely poor and having to make decisions about whether to pay their rent or pay for their medications.

Instituting co-pays has been proposed numerous times and it simply does not work.

Implementing co-pays means that people won't get their meds simply because they cannot afford to do so. If a person skips even one dose of their HIV meds, their virus can mutate requiring a complete change in their combination therapies which may or may not exist.

The Governor is proposing a \$2.4 million cut to the Housing/Homeless line, under which AIDS housing falls. If we lose any of that funding, we will be responsible for the loss of housing to some percentage of the more than 1,300 men, women and children the 27 AIDS housing programs house. Last year, 95% of the 2,500 people requesting housing were turned away. In last year's Point in Time Count of people who are homeless in our state, 6% reported as having HIV/AIDS, and in Hartford and New Haven the percentage was 15% and 8%, respectively.

Housing is an evidence based HIV prevention and care strategy. Extensive research presented at the National AIDS Housing Coalition's four research summits has documented that over and over again. Simply put, people who are stably housed are more likely to be in and stay in care, and less likely to engage in high risk behaviors; all of which means far fewer expensive trips to the emergency room or other institutions resulting in an overall cost savings. Adding more people with HIV to our state's homeless population is both expensive and poor public health policy.

Many people living with HIV/AIDS in our state are incredibly socially fragile, have poor literacy skills and lack the ability to navigate through an already complicated system of care. And even those who have the skills face a number of other challenges. As a friend of mine who has been living with HIV/AIDS for many years said to me, "I don't know of any other illness that creates the same level of social stigma, medical crisis and bureaucratic chaos."

The Governor's proposed cuts will place greater and more unmanageable hoops to navigate not only for people whose health care depends on these programs, but it will add to the hoops that their multiple doctors and pharmacists have to jump through as well; thus, creating an even more burdensome health care system.

I also want to oppose the Governor's "delaying" of the HIV/AIDS Home and Community Based Health Care Waiver. This waiver would benefit 100 people; SAVE the state \$1.2 million over two years, and \$4 million in five years. Why delay something that is replicable, evidence-based and will result in cost savings?

There are revenue enhancements and other choices that can be made. Policymakers are refusing added costs to the most wealthy -- but have already approved bigger, more devastating burdens on those with the least resources in our state. We cannot afford to continue down this path. We urge you to support the revenue options proposed by the Better Choices for CT Coalition, which includes closing corporate loopholes, delaying reductions in the estate tax and increasing taxes on those households most able to pay.

Health care and housing cuts will only result in intensifying the significant barriers people already face. We urge you to restore these cuts.

Thank you.